

جامعة إفريقيا العالمية

مركز البحوث والدراسات الإفريقية



## كتاب المستخلصات



مؤتمر الإصلاح والتجديد على ضوء ميراث علي مزروعى ومستقبل الإصلاح

في العالم الإسلامي

مركز البحوث والدراسات الإفريقية – جامعة إفريقيا العالمية

كتاب المستخلصات – مؤتمر الإصلاح والتجديد على ضوء ميراث علي مزروعى ومستقبل الإصلاح في العالم الإسلامي

## The Multiple Marginality of the Sudan

### Identity ( Re- examined)

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#### Introduction:

Fifty years ago, precisely between the 5<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> of February 1968 Sudan Research Unit, which eventually became the Institute of African & Asian Studies after considerable academic and administrative developments, convened its first international conference, Sudan in Africa. Various notable scholars from Sudan and abroad participated in that conference. Ali Mazrui was among the notable scholar who participated in the conference. The title of his presentation The Multiple Marginality of the Sudan was both challenging and provocative. Perhaps the above mentioned title was particularly embarrassing to his host (SRU).

#### Family Background and Academic Career:

Mazrui was born in Mombassa on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 1933 and died in New York on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2014. However, he was buried in Mombassa. He was born and brought up in a family of Afro-Arab ancestry and background. His father Sheikh al Amin was chief Justice of Kenya, and he was also a writer and public debator <sup>(1)</sup>.

Beside his Islamic and afro-Arabian family background and upbringing, Ali Mazrui pursued his education and academic training in American, English, English- oriented institutions, namely: Colombia University, Oxford University, Manchester University and Makerere University. Moreover, he visited and pursued academic career in numerous universities and colleges world- wide. Last, but not least, his association with the U.S.A where he studied, worked and lived continued for more than half a century. He is the author or co-author of more than

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twenty books. One of his notable and renowned contributions is the B.B.C. series “Africa’s Triple Heritage” which was broadcast in the nineteen 80s. This heritage included:

- 1- Colonial and Imperialist Heritage.
- 2- Spiritual and Cultural Heritage of Islam.
- 3- Africa’s own Indigenous heritage.

### **Outstanding Intellectual Abilities:**

In those introductory paragraphs, it is worthwhile to remember that Ali Mazrui had a great ability to challenge, capture and arrest the attention of his readers and audience. He used to dig deep in his mind and search for dichotomies and paradoxes whether he was writing about his family, his country, other neighbouring countries, or even when he was writing about the international scene *vis a vis* politics, society or language. This unique characteristic has been noted by international publishers, newspaper writers and book reviewers who dealt with his publications. As an example of such quality of his writings, I choose the following quotation from the introductory page of one of his books, namely **the power of Babel** which was written jointly by Ali Mazrui and al Amin M. Mazrui. I quote the following paragraphs from this review.

“ Mazrui delights in dualism and dichotomy, in Pairs and parallels, and the paradoxes thereof. Bringing the south point of view to the north, the east to the west, and in turn showing how the north and west’s standpoint and behavior have been culturally conditioned ...” (2)

### **Mazrui’s Contribution to the Sudan in Africa:**

In spite of his challenging approach, or perhaps because of this challenging approach, Ali Mazrui had great ability to capture and arrest the attention of his audience and readers. His presentation to the conference on the Sudan in Africa which is referred to in the introductory paragraph of this article was attended mainly by university professors, academic staff, researchers and intellectuals from ten countries world-wide, however the majority of his audience were Sudanese.

As a young researcher and an administrative assistant who was closely associated with that conference, I felt that a number of Sudanese who attended the presentation mentioned above felt somewhat offended. They felt as though the scholar presenting the paper was telling them “ you are neither here nor there. You are nowhere or, at best, you are peripheral i.e. you are in the border line”. However, I remember that the presentation was highly valued and admired, and remains as a land mark.

### **Mazrui's Marginality of the Sudan : Brief Resume:**

Ali Mazrui refused the simple and naïve idea of Sudan as a bridge between Black Africa and Arab Africa. Instead, he proposed the following:

“ One could see the Sudan as a bridge between Arabic- speaking Africa and English-speaking Africa; between Africa of the homogenized mass nation-states of the future and the Africa of the deep ethnic cleavage of the present; and finally, between west Africa as a cultural unit and Eastern Africa”<sup>(3)</sup>.

The previous quotation which summarizes Mazrui's ideas advocated fifty years ago, highlights contradictions and opposition that are more likely to promote difference and rivalry, and challenge unity. Ideas presented in that quotation may be rendered in terms of the following oppositions:

- 1- Muslim/Christian.
- 2- Arabic/ English.
- 3- East Africa / West Africa.
- 4- Ethic homogeneity / Ethnic cleavage.

Fortunately this gloomy situation has been superseded.

Ideas presented in the previous paragraphs are closely related to the concept of identity which is the major concern of this presentation, particularly with reference to Mazrui's ideas about marginality. Accordingly, it is quite relevant to refer to the components and outlines of identity in the following paragraphs. Such components include:

- Ethnic origin

- Custom and belief.
- Language.
- History.
- Folklore.
- Social behaviour (in general).

However, in order to put such ideas in their appropriate setting, we need to remember that identity is ever changing.

Ali Mazrui expressed notable ideas regarding national integration between the Northern Sudan and the Southern Sudan. Although such ideas tend to be superseded by time, yet they are quite reasonable and valid. Nonetheless, they were extremely valid and realistic fifty years ago. In fact some of them indicate clearly Mazrui's abilities to examine and analyse socio-cultural realities and predict the future with respect to integration and nation building. As an example of such abilities I refer to two statements made in the conclusion of Mazrui's article mentioned above.

The first statement is presented within the context of national integration in Africa as a whole, and yet with specific reference to the Sudan. In such a statement Mazrui mentions:

“ the Sudan represents both an Africa of achieved integration and an Africa of acute structural cleavage. The achieved integration is in the North where the Sudan is well on its way towards becoming a nation –state in a classical sense if it is assessed purely in terms of the cultural homogeneity observed among northerners. But the cleavage with south puts the Sudan also among those unhappy African countries which have acute ethnic divisions and sometimes raging civil wars”<sup>(4)</sup>.

According to Ali Mazrui, fifty years ago, the Sudan was about to achieve integration, specifically in the North where cultural homogeneity is very clear. However, cleavage and ethnic divisions in the South stand on the way of national integration. If this was the situation fifty years ago,

what is the situation to-day specifically when the Southern Sudan is no longer part of the Democratic Republic of the Sudan ?

Ali Mazrui re-iterates the same ideas about integration in a clear way. Moreover, he proposes a definite period and a specific condition for the Sudan to achieve this objective He states,

“ the North on its own could easily be a nation state in a classical European sense within little more than a generation. On the other hand, relations between the North and the South constitute one of the most acute crises of cleavage in the African continent ...”<sup>(6)</sup>.

According to what Mazrui mentioned in the two paragraphs quoted above, and since the Southern Sudan is no longer part of the Democratic Republic of the Sudan, the latter is presently qualified to be described as a country that has achieved national integration.

The scenario of the separation of the Southern Sudan was composed and orchestrated by foreign colonial powers, however it was produced by Southern elite and intellectuals. Although it was a serious blow to most Sudanese, yet it seems that it was a positive step towards national integration of the Sudan. This is in line with Mazrui's ideas which were discussed in the above paragraphs, and that seem to be quite appropriate.

### **Critical Appraisal of the Sudan's Multiple Marginality:**

Before reflecting on Mazrui's notable and valuable ideas about the marginality of the Sudan, we need to reflect on his concept about “ Triple Heritage” namely : Africa's indigenous heritage, spiritual and cultural heritage of Islam and colonial and imperialist legacy. Anybody who lived in East Africa or studied East African culture and society will notice that those three dimensions, or rather, components are not enough to describe the socio-cultural scene in Uganda, Kenya or Tanzania. Persian and Indian influences on African culture and heritage, specifically in Eastern Africa cannot be under-estimated, and should be mentioned on their own right.

The concept of multiple marginality needs to be reviewed, not only concerning the Sudan, but in general. Also other ideas regarding African

people, their countries and their cultures (including the Sudan) need to be taken in consideration.

In this context it is worthwhile to mention that early Arab geographers divided Africa to three regions, namely: *bilād al zanj*, *bilād al sūdān* and *bilād al bidān*. Bilād al sūdān extends from the Red Sea in the east to Senegal in the West, namely from Somalia to Senegal. Countries which fall within *bilād al sudān* are in the middle of Africa and extend from its extreme east to its extreme west. The Democratic Republic of the Sudan falls in the middle of this region. Accordingly, the Sudan is Geo-Centric and Ethno-Centric rather than marginal.

Lately, the concept of centrism (*al wasatiya*) became widely used and accepted in various political and social circles, especially among Sudanese elite. This idea still seems to be very dominant. It provides a way out from the previous tendency which was inclined towards considering the Sudanese as Arab or African, depending on ethnic genealogies and traditions

### **Considerable Changes in Mazrui's ideas:**

Starting from the middle of the previous century considerable changes took place globally and within Africa, specifically Africa became more present on the international scene. Ali Mazrui and his family were directly affected by such changes. In fact they became part of the change which he referred to as follows:

“until the middle of the twentieth century ‘Global Africa’ meant the people of Africa itself combined with the African Diaspora in the Americas, the Caribbean and the Middle East. What has been happening in the twentieth century is a more extensive globalization of global Africa, making the African factor on earth more truly omni-present and omni-directional”.

During the last decades of his life, specifically from the 1980s up to his death in 2014, considerable changes happened in Mazrui's life, namely his identity, social status and sense of belonging. Undoubtedly, such changes were reflected in his writings.

During the years mentioned above, he worked, lived and eventually died in the United States of America. In spite of that his social and spiritual mood were deeply embedded in African soil where he was buried, according to his wish, as mentioned above. However, I doubt that we can attribute the same strong sense of belonging to Africa to his sons who became fully integrated American citizens.

The following lines indicate the importance which he attributed to language and contemporary mass media, namely internet, in facilitating contacts and promoting integration. In this connection, Ali Mazrui poses some questions and provides useful information based upon the experience of his own family and families of his friends. He emphasizes the importance of language as a priori to identity by asking the following questions:

“ when does an American African family evolve into an African American family ? when it loses its ancestral language. the umbilical chord is language. The children of professor Nkiru Nzegwn of Binghamton University are still American Africans (hemispherically) because the children still speak fluent Igbo. On the other hand, my children are now African Americans; their linguistic umbilical chord has been cut... concern for Africa is still intact, and the internet is now providing a new network of Afro-Atlanticism, a new language”<sup>(7)</sup>.

New social, emotional and sentimental affections associated with studying, working, or residing in foreign countries, which are similar to what Ali Mazrui discussed in the previous paragraphs quoted above, have influenced most of us in various ways. However, what is more important is how they affected our sons and grandsons, specifically with reference to identity.

My own grandsons have British passports. They were born in the United Kingdom where their father and mother were pursuing higher studies and advanced medical training. They are presently living in the United Arab Emirates where both their father and mother are working.



They are continuing their studies in British schools in al Ain; a matter which is quite normal and acceptable. In fact it seems to be imperative in such circumstances.

The situation discussed above paved the way to their language competence and language use. Always new situations lead to new realities. As expected, those children became bilingual in English and Arabic. During my last visit to them, approximately two months ago (July 1918) I noticed the following pattern of their language use at home:

- 1- They used English when they were speaking to the house maid.
- 2- They spoke to me in Arabic.
- 3- They mostly used Arabic (and some English) while speaking to their father and mother.
- 4- They mostly used English among themselves.

Various factors will determine their language acquisition and language use in future. Where they pursue their graduate and post-graduate studies, their future jobs, whether they marry Sudanese, Egyptian, English or American wives are among the factors behind shaping the identity of our grandsons and others who are in similar situations.

### **Draught famine war, Immigration & Identity:**

As mentioned in the previous pages, the nineteen eighties witnessed considerable change in Ali Mazri's ideas about identity. The same period i.e. the 1980s also witnessed drastic climatic, social and political changes, in the Central *bilād al Sudān* from Somalia to Senegal.

The Democratic Republic of the Sudan which falls in the middle of this zone is very effective in the region. Like-wise, it is also affected by what happens in that area. During that period, drought, famine and war led to intensive population movements from Western Sudan and West Africa, as well as from Eastern Africa , namely Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea.

In the case of west Africans hundreds of thousands rushed towards the Nile Valley, where they settled permanently, or moved to other regions of the Sudan, especially areas which enjoy irrigated cultivation or those that

are inhabited by West Africans. Those earlier migrants are aware of their identity, and other Sudanese ethnic groups are also aware of the difference of such groups from their own people. However, I expect that they will be assimilated into the Sudanese communities gradually and slowly.

As stated by Ali Mazrui fifty years ago, specifically in February 1968, “the North on its own could easily be a nation state”. This statement implies that the Southern Sudan was a major obstacle on the way of national integration. This handicap, undoubtedly, delayed the progress of the Democratic Republic of the Sudan towards national unity. If we accept Mazrui’s statement, this obstacle has been removed a few years ago, a little less than a decade, specifically since the Southern Sudan voted for separation from the Democratic Republic of the Sudan and established its own nation state.

Undoubtedly, Mazrui’s statement is true to a great extent, but it is still far from being absolutely true. Language (namely Arabic) religion, (specifically Islam) besides ethnic., historical and social linkages have created a sense of unity between most Sudanese living north of the northern borders of the state of Southern Sudan and the southern borders of Egypt. It is noticeable that a sizeable sector of this area falls within the region of bilād al sudān which was mentioned earlier.

Since cultural unity and national integration are usually achieved through decades, and sometimes centuries , it is worth-while to indicate that the colonial policies practiced in certain parts of the Sudan, such as Closed Districts Ordinances have affected certain parts of the Sudan e.g. Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile Districts considerably. Accordingly, when we discuss identity in such, areas, we should realize that a great sector of the people living there preserve regional identity and are far away from national identity.

### **Present Challenges:**

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Nuba mountains and Southern Blue Nile districts are still characterized by social and cultural specificity that requires special attention in our pursuit of achieving

national integration. Positive discrimination has been posed as a way out for handling the situation in such areas. Beside those two areas, Darfur is another area that needs special attention. However, the Darfurian problem has been highly politicized by external influences and national elite. Accordingly, it requires a special study beyond the scope of this presentation.

In addition to the factors which slow down, and perhaps, threaten national integration that have been discussed above such as drought, famine and war, I refer briefly to two examples related to specific factors that continue to threaten national integration and Sudanese identity. The first example which is the immigration of West Africans into the Sudan goes back to more than a century. The second example comes from Darfur, whereas the third example which started to be noticeably alarming only about a decade ago, is related to the increasing number of immigrants from bilād al Shām (Syria, Palestine ...).

The first example i.e. the flow of immigrants from West Africa into the Democratic Republic of the Sudan, never stopped, and could not be controlled. In fact, one doubts whether any noticeable efforts aiming at manipulating and controlling it have been made. Desperate elderly ladies, young children, and even babies have become a noticeable daily scene in the main roads of Khartoum. Most of those who made begging a way of life, come from West Africa. Many of them are living in shanty towns, unfinished buildings under construction and sometimes in deserted streets, or even under bridges. In situations like this, there seems to be no room for identity!

The second example comes from the Western Sudan rather than West Africa. It indicates the fate of children born and brought up in the wake of war, drought and famine, as well as those whose families are living in pot-war camps. This example which refers to the state of children brought up under the conditions mentioned above, is derived from statements made by official government officers in Northern Darfur. Those statements may be summarized as follows:

In Northern Darfur about 30% of children who are of school age, and who attend schools are expected to pay school fees, although government authorities state that education is free. However, their families expect them to pay such fees, look after themselves, as well as, help other members of their families financially. Accordingly, they drop schools and work in local markets before they become beggars and delinquent. Thereafter, they migrate to the national capital, Khartoum<sup>(8)</sup>.

The third example comes from a different region. In fact it comes from outside the African continent, namely from bilād al shām. In this way it is very different from the case of West African immigrants in various ways e.g. Colour, age, socio-economic status as well as reasons for immigration. Unlike the West African immigrants discussed above, the majority of those involved in this case are not socially and economically desperate. Moreover, a number of them are skilled labourers or sales men. In fact, their presence as well as their activities started to be felt in different socio-economic circles. Moreover, the presence of their families is becoming more and more noticeable within the Sudanese community. So far they are keeping socially and ethnically intact, and somewhat separate. However, it is still early to make any reliable statements about their identity, specifically with regard to the possibility of being integrated into the Sudanese community. Nonetheless their presence constitutes a phenomenon that requires attention.

### Conclusion and General Recommendations:

At the end of this presentation, it is necessary to make some concluding remarks and recommendations. Among such remarks and recommendations, I would like to stress the following:

**First**, the concept of identity has changed considerably over the last few decades. In fact it is ever changing. Like-wise, the term marginal is very relative, and it has changed drastically as far as the Sudan is concerned.

**Secondly**, Identity is becoming more and more multi-dimensional, rather than mono-dimensional.

**Thirdly**, the determining factors in identity are not mainly tribal or ethnic, they can also be national, regional, occupational ...etc.

**Specific Remarks about the Sudan:**

**First**, the separation of the Southern Sudan can be a positive step towards identity and national integration in the Democratic Republic of the Sudan, if it is manipulated wisely. The first step towards such manipulation is understanding that “*a friendly neighbor is better than a hostile brother*”.

**Secondly**, the Democratic Republic of the Sudan should develop and enhance a clear and effective policy that will enable it to become a strong and a most effective partner, hopefully a leader, in the Central bilād al Sudān.

**Thirdly**, depending upon the success which the Democratic Republic of the Sudan can hopefully achieve by fulfilling its rôle specified in the previous paragraph, it can become a strategic and most effective linkage between Equatorial Africa and North Africa, as well as between Eastern, Central and Western bilād al Sudān.

References and footnotes:

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- 4- Ibid. p. 254.
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